

Chronology: St. Joseph's Indian Normal School in Context

1840: Rensselaer established when Jasper County was cut off from Newton County. George Spitler, immigrant from Virginia, settled in the country where he began purchase of land south of town until 933 acres by the 1850's.

1854: Fr. Joseph Stephan arrived in area, where, 1854-1878, he was a "circuit" missionary, colonizer, surveyor, horse trader, hunter, centered in San Pierre. In Civil War, served as chaplain and engineer, and got close to military brass, Gens. Thomas, Sherman, Ewing, etc., later politicians.

1867: Ft. Wayne Diocese purchased the Spitler estate, and in 1868, established St. Joseph's Orphan Asylum and Manual Training School, with Stephan as director. Two frame buildings added to the two already there. A temporary measure. Largely supported by the farm.

1878-1881: Stephan = government agent at Standing Rock Reservation in Dakota Territory, and continued until 1884 as Indian missionary there.

1884: Stephan = director of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, Wash. D.C., begun 1875 in response to the Grant "Peace Policy."

1885: Catharine Drexel (Phil.), generously gave of her income [deceased father had left \$14 million in trust] to build Catholic "contract" Indian schools, which expanded from 1883 [\$39,175 contract for 18 schools] to 1892 [\$394,756 for 60 schools, c. 23 of all contract money that year].

1887: Orphanage closed. St. Augustine's church built in Rensselaer in 1885.

1888: Diocese sold 420 acres to Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions for the special Indian school. Drexel applied \$50,000 for land, buildings, and furniture. School opened September 1888. That same fall, Stephan's problems began with Republican president elected. Decided that he could not supervise the school, since he had to be in Washington to defend contracts for the school.

1889: January, Society of Precious Blood took charge of the school, its first experience with Indian work, for which reason, Drexel would have preferred Benedictines.

1889: Saint Joseph's College incorporated, diocese donated to the Society of the Precious Blood 320 acres.

1890: Stephan seemingly successful in Washington, where he secured appropriation [specifically for Rensselaer school] for 60 pupils at \$139 a head. [White Indian School at Wabash, Ind., received \$150, without any hassle.]

1891: Saint Joseph's College Building [first stage] completed, school began that fall.

1893: 30 Indian pupils with teacher on display for 3 weeks in June [2nd after Carlisle] at the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition. That fall, College Main Building completed.

1895: Spring, Indian school contract not renewed. A "sectarian" school, vs. schools teaching "American" Christianity. Protestant contract schools had converted into "government" schools, but often without change of personnel. An ugly nativist campaign carried on by the "American Protective Association."

1896: June, Indian school closed, after operating a year totally with private funds. Farm and buildings leased by the Society of the Precious Blood for three years. Building became a mission house with the frame building housing the new "Messenger Press."

1899: All purchased by the Society of the Precious Blood.

1922: Society donated all of it to Saint Joseph's College, the Press moved to St. Charles Seminary, Carthagena, Ohio. Building used for farm storage.

1937: College remodelled it into its first residence hall [with semi-private rooms]. and named Drexel Hall. Closed "temporarily in 1978."

1944: Chicago Bears occupied the building, trained at SJC until 1974.

1971: Historical marker donated by Indiana Historical Society.